



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/agriculture-africa-less-talk-more-action>

Agriculture in Africa: Less Talk, More Action



Jim Barnhart, USAID

Feed the Future's own Jim Barnhart (far left) visits Ethiopia's first fertilizer blending factory, operated by a local cooperative union.

I recently traveled to Ethiopia for the [African Green Revolution Forum](#), which brings together African, global and private sector leaders for discussions on accelerating progress in improving agriculture and bolstering economic growth.

Prior to the start of the Forum, I had the opportunity to visit an Ethiopian cooperative several hours outside the capital. Re-organized in the early 1990s, the cooperative union had grown remarkably fast thanks to the quality of the services it provides to its primary cooperative members. As a result, it has grown from 10,000 farmers in 1992 to 60,000 today.

In fact, its success has opened new doors in Ethiopia.

The Government of Ethiopia, after decades of importing two types of basic fertilizer, [recently allowed](#) this cooperative to establish the country's first fertilizer blending factory with U.S. support. The cooperative union produces fertilizer blends at the factory that are uniquely suited to the conditions of local soil, and it's already posting impressive sales figures. It's a testament to how, with the right action and incentives, markets—and the policies that influence them—can benefit smallholder farmers.

Ethiopia isn't alone in this regard. African governments across the continent are seizing the opportunity to foster market forces that grow their economies in a way that lifts people out of poverty.

The dialogue at the Forum focused on this very topic, emphasizing movement from a [set of commitments](#) that African countries made earlier this year to double agriculture productivity, eliminate hunger, and cut poverty in half by 2025, to the action needed to actually achieve them.

The timeline is ambitious, but we have good reason to be optimistic.

Harnessing Market Forces for Good

The U.S. Government has been involved in international agriculture for decades. The world has changed however, and we are changing with it. African countries have [taken the lead](#) in their own development, setting priorities and formulating plans. We know the public sector can't achieve ambitious development goals alone; hence, we've rallied the international community around food security and built partnerships across sectors.

African governments are also tapping in to the potential private investment offers to drive long-lasting growth, committing to improve policies that enable markets to flourish. The Forum was well-attended by not just African government leaders, but global and African businesses as well, providing valuable opportunities for networking, deepening engagement, and building trust between sectors.

While I was there, I met with the CEO of Syngenta to discuss our joint work to support smallholder farmers in Africa. The U.S. Agency for International Development and Syngenta [recently announced](#) a partnership to train thousands of farmers in Nigeria and identify opportunities for employment through President Obama's [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#) program—a great opportunity to involve more of Africa's vibrant youth in agriculture.

Expanding Impact

This work and our collaboration with many other businesses, researchers and civil society organizations is helping scale the impact already achieved across Africa. Yields are up and poverty is going down, but we must do more to ensure that this progress reaches more people.

With this in mind, I highlighted with partners at the Forum the United States' [expanded commitment](#) to rapidly scale appropriate technologies that help African countries meet their ambitious new targets. We seek to do that sustainably through commercial channels and help African partners build systems, institutions and policies that make progress a self-sustaining process.

The next generation will be the one to carry this work forward and ensure it lasts.

The next generation will be the one to carry this work forward and ensure it lasts. In August, President Obama hosted the first-ever [U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit](#), aptly themed "Investing in the Next Generation" as we know future growth on the continent will be driven by future African entrepreneurs and leaders. At the Forum, African leaders agreed there is a need to move from talking about supporting youth, women and entrepreneurs (not always mutually exclusive labels) to action. That sense of urgency to start delivering on commitments permeated the entire event.

It was encouraging to see a new generation of young leaders actively participating in the Forum, lending concrete reality to African governments' commitments to increase youth involvement in agriculture.

Ambitious but Achievable

On this and other commitments made through the [Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program](#), African governments have [proven](#) that they can achieve ambitious goals in agriculture and food security in a short time.

The United States has stood with them, supporting their plans for food security and nutrition with efforts like the U.S. [Feed the Future](#) initiative and contributions to the international [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](#). This new model for development, characterized by country leadership, partnerships and a relentless focus on results, is already achieving [exciting progress](#).

Through these efforts, we're partnering with African governments to create environments that are friendly to businesses and smallholder farmers. In doing so, we're harnessing the power of market forces to help drive inclusive growth on the continent—the kind of growth that creates jobs and opportunities for everyone, including women and youth.

In a world where optimism is in short supply these days, this is something we can all be proud of. Africa and the United States have achieved a lot already, working together to replace famine with food security and ensure families not only have hope for a better future, but have the tools and resources they need to actually create one.

Indeed, the substantive policy discussions at the Forum reinforced the lessons I learned my first day in Ethiopia meeting with cooperative members: We can attack and eradicate poverty if we turn talk into action to harness the right incentives and allow markets to flourish.

Join the discussion online this week about ending poverty. Tune in to USAID's [**Frontiers in Development Forum**](#) September 18-19 using the hashtag #endpoverty.

[**Follow Feed the Future online**](#) to learn more about what the United States is doing to help communities around the world alleviate poverty and hunger.

Looking to get involved? [**Explore our website**](#) for ideas and opportunities.